

Gold Panning in Nevada County: An Insider's Guide

By Valerie Moberg



You've tasted Nevada County wines, visited the local shops, enjoyed a variety of restaurants, and now you want to experience some of the local history. Since 1848, when gold was first discovered, people have come to the area in search of our region's rich, intriguing history --and you can do it, too. If you're not up to the challenge, Nevada City and Grass Valley offer a range of gold mining history which is easily pursued at our parks and unique museums. But once you learn how easy it is to find this precious metal, you'll probably want to try your hand at it. There is still a lot of gold in Nevada County rivers.

The secret to finding gold in Nevada County is knowing where to look. Fortunately, nearly 2.9 miles of prime South Yuba River near Nevada City are open for public recreational gold prospecting. There's good news—the river is constantly accumulating gold! Although much of it was removed during the Gold Rush, much of it was not. According to mining experts, “gravity and time are two natural laws that work to the advantage of gold prospectors.”

Gold Panning at Bridgeport

One of the most popular spots on the South Yuba River is Bridgeport, where there is easy river access, and on weekends, gold panning demonstrations! Located off Pleasant Valley Road, Bridgeport provides easy access to the westernmost side of the South Yuba River State Park. Every Saturday and Sunday from Memorial Day through Labor Day weekend, 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. the park offers gold panning demonstrations. For more information about gold panning at Bridgeport, you can call the Bridgeport office at 530-432-2546.

How to Pan for Gold

Don't worry: if you miss the demonstration, you can still find gold. All you need is a 12 or 18-inch gold pan, a small shovel, bucket, spoon, pocketknife and a small vial for your gold flakes.

Once you're at the river you'll want to look for old mine tailings, turns in the river, tree roots and the ends of gravel bars. These are places where gold may have settled.

Scoop up some water, sand, and gravel in your pan. Tilt the pan and slowly wash material over the edge. Keep at it until you're down to black sand. Look carefully and you might find gold. But don't be fooled--many a miner has mistaken Fool's Gold, that's the minerals pyrite or mica, for the real thing.

Gold Mining History

Because the area is so rich in mining history, there are several museums you might want to check out, beginning with Empire Mine State Park and Museum. The Park is the site of the oldest, largest and richest gold mine in California. Empire Mine contains many of the original mine buildings, the owner's cottage and restored gardens, as well as the entrance to 367 miles of abandoned and flooded shafts and tunnels. More information about the Mine park is available at <http://www.empiremine.org>.

Still want more? Check out:

- Firehouse No. 1 Museum located at the top of Broad Street in Nevada City.
- Narrow Gauge Railroad Museum, which is dedicated to the preservation of local transportation history and artifacts from the narrow gauge railroad era.
- Northstar Mine Museum's collection of mining paraphernalia from steam engines to picks and shovels and Pelton wheels.
- Searls Historical Library at 214 Church Street in Nevada City. The library serves as the archive for the Nevada County Historical Society.

Pasties—a Miner's Meal

Sometime during the day, be sure to try a pastie, the traditional food of the Cornish miners who came to Nevada County from Cornwall, England. These delicious stuffed pies can be found in Grass Valley at Marshall's Pasties, Cousin Jack Pasties, and King Richard's Pasties. If you want to make your own pasties at home, here's the link to the recipe, <http://www.nevadacountygold.com/goldrushtown/pasty.html>.

Valerie Moberg is the proprietor of the historic Broad Street Inn, and the go-to person for information about Nevada City. Built in 1870, Broad Street Inn is a small, family-owned, eco-friendly green business that prides itself on providing comfortable accommodations at affordable rates. Located in the heart of historic downtown Nevada City, this Victorian inn offers six contemporary rooms and a peaceful garden setting just a short walk from downtown Nevada City's great shops, restaurants, theaters, and wineries. For more information about the Broad Street Inn and the Nevada City area, contact Valerie by phone (530.265.2239) or email (info@broadstreetinn.com) or on the Web: <http://www.broadstreetinn.com>.

